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ABSTRACT

A number of factors have led to the crisis of work force unpreparedness that the United States now faces, including revolutionary changes that mean businesses now succeed on the qualities of their human rather than material resources. Jobs are demanding better reading, writing, and reasoning skills, and mental agility has replaced manual dexterity as a required skill. Yet 70 percent of all high school seniors cannot write a basic letter seeking employment. The work force is growing at the slowest rate in 40 years, and as a result an increasing number of businesses are facing a shortage of skilled workers. These problems and challenges are so big that no single agency, no single individual, no single group can solve them on its own. The proposed amendments to refocus the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) would redirect funds to the least skilled and most economically disadvantaged citizens, those facing such barriers to employment as basic skills deficiencies, homelessness, teenage parenting, or a poor school record. Each trainee would be assessed for needs, and goals would be set that focus on achievement and growth rather than on filling job slots. The JTPA program could provide job-seeking and job-readiness skills. Vocational programs could provide youth with the technical occupational skills that lead to a whole career field, not just a job. The result would be an integrated, comprehensive system that would turn young lives around and provide employers with a skilled work force. (CML)

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ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR POLICY JENNA DORN
REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY
AMERICAN VOCATIONAL ASSOCIATION
DECEMBER 2, 1989
ORLANDO, FLORIDA.

Thank you, Paul, for that kind introduction. It is a pleasure to be with you this morning in Orlando.

Columnist James Kilpatrick once wrote that **"Washington, D.C. is a great place for doing, acting, achieving, moving and shaking. The city is constantly meeting, voting, hearing, deciding, confirming, passing, rejecting, sustaining, overriding, conniving, quarreling, plotting, confronting, and joining."**

"Washington is perfect for all these things," Kilpatrick concluded, **"But it is not much of a place for thinking."**

Well, it's a great pleasure to be here in the fresh air of Orlando where some fresh thinking is taking place on topics of great importance to Secretary Dole, the Department of Labor, and America.

I have the honor of working for a woman who is one of America's outstanding public servants--Secretary Elizabeth Dole. The Secretary is deeply disappoint that she was unable to be here with you, and before she left for Poland, she asked me to read this letter.

"Dear Friends of the American Vocational Association: Please accept my apologies for being unable to attend your annual convention in Orlando. As you know, I had planned to be with you, but the Presidential Mission to Poland intervened. I know that your thoughts and prayers are with the Polish people, as they continue on their road to democracy. I am very grateful for all you, the members of the American Vocational Association, have accomplished to improve the education and training of America's workforce. I am counting on your continued leadership as we move into a new decade. With warm regards and admiration, Sincerely, Elizabeth Dole."

Let me just echo the Secretary's words, and tell you that at the Labor Department, we believe that those Americans involved in vocational-technical education are Americans who are on the front line of one of the most critical issues of our time--ensuring that we have the best-skilled and best-trained workforce to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

C-25-1044

The AVA has united business, labor, and education in a commitment to quality vocational education and training. And, we're going to need all your efforts if our economy is to continue its remarkable record of 84 consecutive months of expansion.

Today, I would like to briefly share some thoughts about the remarkable changes taking place in today's workplace...How the Department of Labor and the Bush Administration are responding to these changes...And, most importantly, what America's vocational education community must, in our view, be doing to ensure that America enters the next decade with the finest, best-skilled workforce in the world.

And make no mistake about it. Providing that workforce will be a monumental challenge. For the fact is, that as we enter the last decade of this century, America faces a workforce crisis.

Secretary Dole puts it simply, "America's workforce is in a state of unreadiness...unready for the new jobs, unready for the new realities, unready for the new challenges of the 90's."

A number of factors have led to our precarious situation:

First, the American workplace has undergone revolutionary changes in the past years. Businesses now succeed on the service and qualities of their human resources, rather than material resources, such as machinery.

Across the board, jobs are demanding better reading, writing, and reasoning skills. More--much more--math and science. Mental agility has replaced manual dexterity as a required skill.

For example, in 1965, an automotive mechanic needed to understand 5,000 pages of service manuals to fix any automobile on the road. Today, with the advent of high-tech electronics, that same mechanic must be able to decipher 465,000 pages of technical text--the equivalent of 250 big-city phone books.

It is no wonder that in your most recent issue of Vocational Education Journal, the author states **"No one without good reading skills can be employed today as an automotive service technician."** To the requirement of good reading skills, I would add good judgment, good reasoning, and good math skills.

And this trend will continue in the years to come. The jobs that will experience the most growth will be in the service, managerial, and skilled technical fields. Most notably, over half the jobs in our economy will soon require education beyond high school.

Those are the needs of our workplace. And they are needs that are not being met by the skills of our workforce.

I know you are very familiar with the statistics. But let me briefly share some with you, as they define the size and scope of our problem.

*25% of our young people--perhaps as many as one million students a year--drop out of high school. And of those who do graduate, a very disturbing number can't even read their diplomas.

*70% of all high school seniors can't write a basic letter seeking employment.

*60% of them can't correctly add up their own lunch bills.

*And our problems extend beyond our future workers to include our current labor force. The skills of a large number of experienced workers are now obsolete or soon will be made obsolete by changes in technology. Additionally, at least 20 million, and possibly as many as 40 million adults, experience substantial literacy problems.

And the implications of those numbers to our workforce can be seen in the fact that four out of every five applicants at Motorola Corporation recently flunked an entry level employment exam. And do you know what that exam required? Seventh grade English and fifth grade arithmetic skills.

That, as they say is the bad news. But there is some good news. For with our challenge comes an opportunity. The American workforce is now growing at a rate of only 1% annually--the slowest rate of growth in 40 years. As a result, an increasing number of businesses are facing a shortage of skilled workers.

If we succeed in our challenge of providing the necessary skills to those who need them--especially to those who have been on the outside looking in for far too long--then we truly can fulfill a dream: That every man and woman who wants a job, can have a job--if they have the skills.

And that's where you come in. Vocational and technical education is the largest occupational education system in the world--a system that annually receives about $12 billion in government funding. It's a system that has done much to educate and train America's youth.

But like all of us who are involved in education and workforce issues, it's a system that must come to grips both with the new requirements of the workplace, and the workforce crisis we face. It is also imperative that, in an era of scarce resources, more careful targeting of priorities occurs. In short, we are all

deeply involved in systems that must undergo change if we are to remain relevant to the future.

Jim Kadamus,President of the National Association of State Directors of Vocational Education, hit the nail on the head when he wrote,

"The mission of vocational education clearly needs to be redefined. It's traditional role--training a high school student to do a specific job--is no longer viable. (What is required are) programs that enable students to acquire...broad transferable skills...that will help them adapt to changing workplace requirements and benefit from life-long education and retraining."

In other words, voc-ed can no longer be satisfied with the status quo. Vocational and technical skills without basic skills is a formula that does not ensure success in the workplace.

I am not suggesting that changes in the voc-ed system take place in a vacuum. Indeed, if we are to have any chance of success in turning young lives around, and in meeting the needs of our employers, then other institutions in the education and human resources community must undergo dramatic reform, as well.

Perhaps the most important reform that must be adopted is that all education and human service agencies must work together. We can no longer afford to worry about power bases or protecting our turf.

Our problems and challenges are so big, that no single agency, no single individual, no single group, can solve them on their own. The bureaucratic barriers which promote duplicative and inefficient programs must be brought down.

These twin policies of meeting the needs of a new decade, and meeting them together, can be seen in Secretary Dole's proposals for the Job Training and Partnership Act-the Department of Labor's program to provide training to disadvantaged youth and adults.

We believe that JTPA, which has been effective, can be made even better. Funds don't always reach the individuals and areas who need help the most. Some JTPA programs operate in isolation from other agencies which provide related and needed services. And frankly, Secretary Dole is greatly concerned that providing basic skills has not been part of the JTPA program, and that no performance standards have been established by which success could be measured.

Vocational education programs and job training programs have had a long relationship. But it has bene primarily one in which the voc-ed community acted as subcontractors for our training programs. The time has come to move beyond this level of

cooperation, to move to one that fosters considerably more interagency collaboration among JTPA, voc-ed, and indeed all programs involved in providing human services. We need, in short, a total support system--where all the parts move and work together to create a human resource policy for America.

Secretary Dole and President Bush have proposed legislation to refocus JTPA, redirecting funds to the least-skilled and most economically-disadvantaged Americans--those facing such barriers to employment as basic skills deficiencies, homelessness, teen-age parenting or a poor school record.

We must ensure that we are offering more than just training for a job. We must also offer the remedial education, job readiness training, counseling and other supportive services that at-risk youths and adults need. How else will we break the cycle of unemployment, and arm our youth not just with a job, but with the independence and skills for a lifetime of productive work?

Under our proposal, each individual trainee will be assessed for his or her particular needs, and goals will be set for each young person to meet those needs. The focus would be shifted to the long-term--to achievement and growth--not on simply pushing kids or adults into job slots.

Closer integration of services and a partnership with education is woven throughout the fabric of our proposed legislation. We have proposed a system of incentive grants which will serve as a strong enticement for governors to develop a better coordinated human resources policy. And we will provide these grants only to states that pledge to link the funds as part of a clear, comprehensive, coordinated strategy with defined, measurable goals.

For example, a state may develop a program with the goal of reducing the at-risk student drop-out rate from 40% to 10%. If the state wants to receive Department of Labor funding, then it will have to tell Secretary Dole exactly how they will meet that goal and what other programs will be pooled and leveraged in the process.

To reach this goal, the JTPA program could provide job-seeking and job-readiness skills, such as resume-writing, interviewing, and orientation to the requirements of the workplace. JTPA and schools, working together, might jointly fund literacy training. Community services and welfare funding could be utilized for counseling and day care. And voc-tech programs could be used for providing youth with the technical occupational skills that lead to a whole career field--not just a job.

The end result would be an integrated, comprehensive system that would make a real difference in turning young lives around,

and in providing employers with a skilled workforce.

For some, this is a revolutionary approach--as is the concept of State Human Resources Investment Council. This umbrella council, of which voc-ed is a vital part, would give advice to governors on federally funded human resource programs. This concept has strong support in Congress, and is included in both our proposed JTPA amendments, and in the House-passed Carl Perkins Vocational Education Legislation.

If we are to have a prayer of success in building a comprehensive human resource development system we must all sit at the same policy table, and work better, work smarter, and above all, work together.

This is the only way in which we can assist those Americans who have been at the end of the line for far too long. It is the only way to bridge the skills gap and provide America with the workforce needed to meet the challenges of a complex global marketplace.

The reality of today is that it's not just the traditionally economically disadvantaged who might be termed "at-risk." All employers and employees are "at-risk," unless our workforce possesses the skills required in today's workplace, and unless workers are willing to constantly adapt to new technologies.

Replacing this risk with stability is the goal of Secretary Dole's recently released "Call to Quality"--a seven-point agenda for improving America's overall workforce. And the vocational community must also be actively involved in this agenda if we are to succeed.

The Secretary believes that the connection between educational excellence--that you are striving for--and business success is fundamental. Closer ties between business and education must be formed.

Businessmen and women, parents, educators, and students, themselves, need to know much more than simply comparative statistics that tell how a student performs compared to others--an 8th grade reading level or a 90% score on a test, for example. What we must know is how our students are performing compared to the actual needs of the workplace.

The Secretary will soon appoint a "Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills." This blue-ribbon panel will include top leaders from business, labor, and education. They will be charged with the mission of hammering out national competency guidelines that reflect work readiness.

These guidelines will serve as working definitions of what

skills employers require and workers need on the job--what's necessary in the three R's, in critical thinking, problem-solving, communicating, listening, and adapting through higher math and science to meet today's new complexities.

Businessmen and women tell us constantly that the skills of new workers are simply not meeting the needs of the workplace.

Local schools, as well as vocational-technical and job training programs, can use these guidelines to help develop relevant curriculum for promotion and graduation. And businesses and parents will be better able to judge if students are receiving the skills required for the jobs not just of tomorrow, but of today.

Secretary Dole and the Labor Department are also vitally concerned with what happens to students after they leave school--especially the 40% of our high school graduates who go directly to work. The United States is one of the few western nations without a formalized school-to-work transition. Too many of these young people "kick around" for several years trying to find themselves. With our workforce growing at its slowest rate in 40 years, we can't afford this any longer.

Vocational education is of great importance here, and across the country, local businesses and schools are combining in innovative partnerships and programs. And the Department of Labor will be funding a series of demonstration projects to build on innovative models which assist in school-to-work transition.

Some of the most innovative examples might build on approaches being developed by vocational educators, such as work-based "2 + 2" Program, where students spend their last two years in high school, and two years in a community college, pursuing an integrated curriculum both in the classroom and the workplace. Employers would participate in such a program through a partnership with education, and by offering real work experience to students during the learning process.

And in the spring of next year, the Secretary will convene a national conference of employers, unions, educators, and training professionals to review and discuss the school-to-work issue and to share effective programs. She will also seek recommendations for fundamental reform in how we assist non-college youth in their transition to work.

Since over two-thirds of America's workforce in the year 2000 are working today, Secretary Dole's agenda also moves beyond programs for future workers, and devotes needed attention to upgrading the skills of current workers. Presently, America's employers only spend 1.3% of payroll expenses on formal training programs. This must be dramatically increased.

There are a number of industries--the construction industry for example--that have outstanding training programs based on the principle of apprenticeship. Workers receive training and instruction which are widely accepted, and which serve as "portable credentials." Employers throughout the industry know precisely what skills are possessed by those who complete the program, and the process of matching employees with employers is greatly expedited.

We are studying the possibility of expanding this principle into other occupations--including many in the service industry. We will work with industries to develop accredited workplace training programs and to expand this concept of "portable credentials."

But we will need the input of professional vocational educators to help devise the occupational standards that will serve as the base of these portable credentials. We will also need your help in implementing this, if these portable credentials are to be available to a wide range of students and trainees.

Those are just a few of the plans on Secretary Dole's agenda...plans, as I said, that need the assistance and advice of America's vocational community as they are implemented.

And let me assure you that as we meet the challenges that await, Secretary Dole and the entire Department of Labor will continue to support the vocational education system, and will work diligently with all of you.

As we prepare to meet our challenges, let us take heart from the words of a great President. Almost 100 years ago, Teddy Roosevelt confronted the 20th century and said: **"We are face to face with our destiny, and we must meet it with a high and resolute courage. For ours is the life of action, of strenuous performance of duty. Let us live in the harness, striving mightily; Let us run the risk of wearing out, rather than rusting out."**

Ladies and gentlemen, we will run that risk. And, with the assistance the vocational-technical education community, we will ensure that the new decade is a decade of opportunity for youths, adults, our workforce, and America, herself.